TRANSCRIPT—Betsy Milford

Fairview Community History Project

Interviewee:	Betsy Milford
Interviewer:	Sandra Jackson, Ruth Erlich
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Ruth Erlich: Today is Tuesday, October 30th. Sandra Jackson and Ruth Erlich are here with Betsy Milford, to interview Betsy for the Fairview History Project. So, we're going to get started with Betsy by asking Betsy to tell us about when you were born, where you were born, how you came to Western North Carolina.

Betsy Milford: I was born September 21st, 1949 in Tallahassee, Florida. I lived my whole life in Tallahassee until I went off to school at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, which my father had gone to when Furman was a boys' school and then I had aunts that went to G.W.C., which is Greenville Women's College. And then they built a new campus out from town and that's when I was able to go and it was just a beautiful campus, built around a little lake and bell tower. I worked my way through in the dining hall and just loved it. I loved the campus and loved the people. It was small. My high school was bigger than my college, but it was really, really neat.

RE: What did you major in?

BM: I majored in Elementary Education. I always knew I either wanted to be a Elementary School teacher, or an Elementary Librarian in a school. Because I loved books so much. But I finally went with the kids, so I could teach them to read. I always

taught Kindergarten, for thirty-two years. I got married right out of college in 1971 and we lived in Albany, Georgia for a while, then we moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, and then eventually to Raleigh with my daughters. Jenny and Sarah were born in Knoxville in nineteen seventy-five and seventy-six. They are fifteen months apart, not kind of on purpose but it worked. So, we moved to Raleigh when they were three and four and kind of lived in a subdivision and they could actually walk to school. There was a little crossing guard named Mickey, he was actually the custodian and he would put on his little crossing guard outfit for the beginning of school and after school. My girls rode their bikes and he was my Jenny's best friend. They had started the Charter Schools and Jenny was going into first grade and my younger daughter, Sarah, was going into Kindergarten and I thought, this would be great and especially to start it, in the Charter School. Well, my first-grader was not going to leave Lynn Road Elementary and Mickey, the crossing guard slash custodian because he was her best friend. And she said, 'I could sign her up whereever I wanted to, but she wasn't going anywhere but Lynn Road School.

RE: Who did you marry?

BM: I married a fellow named Jack Milford, who was from Greenville, South Carolina. I met him at Furman. I did salads and desserts and he did water and tea and did the drinks. So, we met that way and we were married for twenty-seven years and have just the two daughters, Jenny and Sarah.

RE: How did you end up coming to this area?

BM: When we lived in Raleigh, my husband always, since he grew up in Greenville, he always wanted to move to the mountains. So, when there became an opening here, he was with the Defense Investigative Service, when there was an opening here, he jumped into it. And our problem was, not a problem but it was a little bit of a struggle—since I had never changed schools, I'd always started in Elementary School and went all the way through High School with some still dear friends, I didn't want my girls to have to start a school and then have to take them out. So, I was determined we would be here by the time school started. They were in fifth and sixth grade, nine and ten, and back then, the sixth grade was in the old school and it was still at Fairview Elementary. So, I drove up here, we were staying kind of in Greenville for a time, and we drove up here, I enrolled them in school, and said, 'We will be here, somehow or other, at Fairview Elementary.' I didn't how because we had no place to live, and we had not sold the house in Raleigh. But I did not want to move them during the school year. Particularly my sixth-grader, who would be going to middle school, I wanted them to have a sense of family, or community, and get to know kids, especially before they went to middle school and were in with the Oakley kids and Haw Creek kids. So, I enrolled them in school in the summer and Ronnie Sams was the principal, and the day that we were there in the summer, they were literally moving the second-floor library down to the first floor because the flooring of the library was falling through.

RE: And what year was this, do you remember?

BM: 1986. And my older daughter, she was upset because she was going to stay in Elementary School, whereas all her friends back in Raleigh were going to Middle School for sixth grade. And then to have them moving the library down book by book, in

this old decrepit building, she thought that we might be taking her life in danger. So, she went and sat in the car for a little bit of the tour of the school. So, she wasn't sure about this and her younger sister was in fifth grade, they both were on the same wing upstairs. I enrolled them in school, we had not sold the house in Raleigh, we had bought this property but we couldn't afford to build on it until we sold the house in Raleigh. So, I was determined to find something to rent in Fairview. Now this was a long time ago and there was not much for rent. And so, there was some kind of Real Estate program on Sunday morning on TV and it had this house that we ended up renting. It was actually for sale, but it had not sold in quite some time. This was out on Garren Creek, right across the street from Kerstein Road. It was right up from Ned and Ann's Goat House, which was right on our property. It was a half mile straight up, and the house was built on stilts. The people before us had been evicted at gun point. They had stolen the washing machine, dryer, refrigerator, dishwasher, wood stove. The only thing they left was the kitchen sink, which I didn't even know you could take a stove because I'd lived all my life in one place and we just had the same stove. Anyway, we were determined and we moved there on the Sunday before school started on Monday. Well, I had my girls out right on the side of the road, and the bus just rode on by. I had enrolled them in school, I thought it would stop there, but it didn't. So, I took them to school and at that point we had no telephone, we had no address, we didn't have anything. It was really kind of crazy trying to fill out the paperwork. And we didn't have cell phones back then. So while they were in school the first day, we went and bought a mailbox, got an address out here, and it was a half mile, it was actually off of Old Sharon Road, the whole bunches of boxes back then, and so then we had a post office box, and still no phone but it took us a few

days to get a phone. I met Joan Lunsford, the school secretary who had been there for years, and she was so kind. And I just was at her mercy, you know, to do whatever. Anyway, we got off to an auspicious beginning because of not having an address, and the bus going on by, but by within a month, my girls said, 'You know, it's not where you live, it's not what anybody looks like, it's the people that make such a difference, and we want to stay here forever.' What happened was, we got there on a Sunday, and I was a walker so I went out walking Kerstein Road, not Garren Creek which has more traffic on it. And I walked up and I met a lady named Mary Dean Beland who was out by her mailbox planting bulbs. And we got to talking and she invited me—she had a son, Scott, who was my older daughter's age, Jenny. So anyway, they had a little summer camp through our church, their church then, and she invited us to go on Sunday about six o'clock to see the end of the year play that the kids put on. We went and my girls said, 'Sign us up for this.' They loved it. So, we started going to Fairview Christian Fellowship, we started when it was in the garage behind Will and John Wander's office. We had Sunday school in the waiting room of the doctor's office. The kids had their little Sunday schools back in the examining rooms. So that was a feat, trying to keep them from tearing the place up. And then we went to the little garage and there was a wood stove in it, and since I'm from Florida and I was freezing here, I would high tail it to the wood stove and sit around the wood stove to warm up and then we got to be so large we had add on to the garage a little bit. It had a garage door, and it was usually open but if it rained, you could close it a little bit. The dogs were there, you know, it didn't make any difference. We just loved it, absolutely loved it. And we made really close friends there that are still friends and that's where—actually no, my girls came out the first day of

school with cheerleading forms, and I'm thinking, 'Cheerleading for what? I don't even know what they have around here.' But I wanted them to get involved and meet kids, so I let them do it. The second day they came out with soccer forms. They had played soccer, girls' soccer, in Raleigh, but I'd given all their shin guards and all their equipment away because I didn't think they would have it in Asheville, much less Fairview. So, I gave all their stuff away, because I didn't want it to remind them of it. Well, they started playing. You had to go meet at Reynolds Middle School to sign up for soccer. And that's where I met John and Annie Ager, and lots of other people. And so, my girls started playing soccer right away. At the beginning I was not working. I had taken ten years off when my girls were born. They were born fifteen months apart and I had taught English smocking. I used to sew for them and so people at church in Raleigh would say, 'If we come to your house, will you teach us?' And I hadn't really thought about teaching it, but I thought, 'Well, it's a little way to make money.' My girls were going to the little church preschool, so I could still take carpool at nine, be home at nine-thirty, teach nine-thirty to eleven-thirty, and go pick up the carpool. So, I taught at home, around this very table for several years in Raleigh, and then I taught—in my younger daughter's preschool, there was this set of twins and their mother owned the Bernina dealership and so I actually taught for her, at the Bernina dealership for three or four years. That's how I earned my sewing machine. Then when we moved here, I started thinking, 'You know I probably need to get back into teaching.' I'd missed it, I loved being a stay-at-home mom, and I'd been very involved in the PTA where my girls were at Lynn Road School, but I started looking for a job here, and I ended up at a—it was kind of like a Charter School, it was called Carver Alternative School, in Black Mountain. And I only worked there one year

before it closed down. But while I was there—it was a very small school, there was a K-one combination, two-three, and a four-five. And half the day I was in the K-one as an assistant. The other half of the day they paid me, the PTA, to be the PE teacher, which I did not know anything about. But my girls had had PE back in Raleigh, so I said, 'What do you do?' She said, 'Well you start with jumping jacks, and so we did. My girls kind of taught me what a real PE teacher does. We played a lot of kickball. The kids loved kickball and so we would exercise. But at the end of that year, they closed the school. I was determined to try to get to Fairview Elementary. This had become my home already. And I just really wanted a chance to teach here. And I started out as an assistant at Fairview. I was an assistant with a wonderful lady named Johnnie Brown. I was assistant for her in a kindergarten class for a year and then the next year, in February, she retired. And so meanwhile I had gotten my certification. I had to renew it. I had never had a North Carolina teaching certificate. When I went to Furman, there was not Elementary and Secondary Ed, actually I was just an education major at Furman. Because they didn't have Kindergarten, they didn't have public Kindergarten. So, I had to get some credits but I was able to get them through—the one in Sylva. Western. And they came actually to UNCA at night in the summers. So, I was able to get Early Childhood credits through them plus get my hours and apply for my certificate. And the timing was just great because during that time we also had built the house, and so that was perfect not to be actually teaching, but be an assistant at that point. And so, when Mrs. Brown retired in February, I was able to take that class. There were only three Kindergarten classes back then—Mrs. King, Joyce Penland, and this was in the old school and everybody walked right by our classroom to get to the cafeteria. But it was a wonderful situation. The people

were so, so nice and I just loved it, loved all the kids, and I was just so blessed to have gotten—I really only wanted Kindergarten so to have had the opportunity to be there when there was an opening, because there weren't many openings in three Kindergarten classes.

SJ: Miss Brown had taught James, so it had been a long time ago.

BM: Yes, she had been there a long time. Anyway, it was just kind of a God thing, that I was blessed to have ended up there to where they got to know me, first as an assistant and then when there was an opening, Pat Gowan actually hired me. She was the Assistant Principal and then Mr. Sams left and she became Principal. I loved Fairview School and I was going to tell you a little bit—our Fall Festival there is totally different than the Fall Festival at the new Fairview Elementary School, which is now twenty-nine, thirty years old. Back then, one of the events was throwing cow patties. That was fun. There was the Hairy Leg Contest and that's where you would give pennies—I remember Ralph Weber and John Ager and Will Hamilton always did it, and you would vote for the couple of weeks ahead of time by putting a penny in a little bucket for whoever's Dad you thought had the hairiest legs, and then they would come to Fall Festival in their shorts so you could actually see how hairy their legs were. That was just kind of—instead of having raffle baskets, we were doing hairy legs. It was a lot of made-up kind of stuff, but it was really, really neat. I remember one year they had an old car that they let you take a sledge hammer and pay a little bit of money to beat it to death. And we had a tricycle race, with the teachers, and they were old rusty tricycles and I'll never forget Margaret Roberts, who taught fifth grade, cut her leg open and so somebody had to take her to the Emergency Room because we didn't have Urgent Care back then. And we

actually cooked in the kitchen, in the cafeteria kitchen, or either they had cooked hamburgers and hotdogs and we just warmed them up. But I remember as teachers and parents we would just—people would come through the line and get their lunch that way, if they wanted to eat. And they did have the most wonderful pie-eating contest, which I did extremely well at with a chocolate pie. Sandy McIntosh (sp?) and I just about tied. I think I beat her. But, anyway, that was very much fun. But anyway, it was a lot different. totally different. The Fall Festival they have now is just fabulous. I think I heard they raised twenty-eight thousand dollars this year, and that's amazing.

RE: Tell us about, how long were you at Fairview Elementary teaching before the new school got started. Tell us about that, you had mentioned that before.

BM: I was only there two years. Two and a half I guess, since I started on February first. John and Annie Ager and Mr. Clarke, who used to be on our school board, Annie's dad, and they had kind of talked to the county people and said, 'We just really need a new building.' They were like the president of the PTA, and then Ralph and Mary Weber and I'm trying to think of who all the people—but a lot of people—and they just started saying, 'We really need a new building,' and so the commissioners and whoever got it done. And the most unusual thing was, they – we stored all of our things in the old—we called it the old gym, now it's the community center. And the teachers stored all of our stuff. Of course, I'm such a scrounger, then they came in the summer and they had this big wrecking ball that actually knocked down the old school.

SJ: I have pictures I took of that.

BM: Do you really? And, before they came with the wrecking ball, I would go through the bottoms of peoples' closets, that were going to be gone anyway—I mean the stuff was going to be thrown away—and find all sorts of interesting things. In Kindergarten you can use lots of stuff, either for Arts and Crafts or for whatever. And so, I had scrounged and got some of that, but the most unusual thing to me was they said we would start on time, and the building would be finished. And it was. It was. That was just amazing. You don't hear of that very often. So, we started on time, we even had new tables, new furniture. It was really big time back then. And of course, I had kept some of the old stuff that was going to be junked, you know, too, and painted it and fixed it up, to add to the new classroom. But, in the beginning, by that time we only had four Kindergarten classrooms, so there were four wings of the new school, and there were like two or three extra rooms on each wing. Now they have mobile units for Art and Music. I mean for many, many years now, because Fairview has grown so much. The Art teacher was on the Kindergarten/First Grade wing, she was the first room on the left and she had a kiln where the bathroom should have been. Well, she didn't get to use that classroom but maybe three or four or five years before they needed it for a regular class. Anyway, it was just wonderful. The parents were so supportive. We always had the most fabulous PTA. I even went and worked at Fall Festival this year because just because I think so much of the PTA. I was a lot of the time the teacher rep on the PTA board because they just did so much for us. Practically anything we wanted, within reason, they would try and do it for us. That's what all the Fall Festival money went for, to put back into the school.

RE: Before we started recording, you talked about the old school and how the proximity of the new school and you focused on something that was going on with your kids.

BM: When I taught Kindergarten in the old school, we had a little back door and two or three little cement steps that went right outside to a horse pasture. Well, that's where they ended up building the new school, right in the horse pasture. I missed the neighing and all, but it was very close to my classroom, to the back door. And we just studied construction equipment all year, which I knew nothing about but the little boys were just in hog heaven, and the girls too. We'd just look out the window and it was amazing. But they erected a huge chain link fence so that nobody could actually join them, which was very helpful, very safe. And so, we got to watch it being built and then the kids got to be in it the next year.

RE: And you still refer to this as the new school.

BM: I do. It's just I'm a creature of habit.

RE: I think we've heard that before, have we not, that people who saw the old school will still refer to the school that's existing now as the new school. That to them, it's still a point of reference. So that's pretty common.

BM: And what I'm so thrilled at, there was a lot of talk about demolishing the old gym because it was not in the best of shape. But it is—.

[Phone rings. Recorder turned off.]

SJ: You're back on. You were talking about the building. Oh well, start over and do something else.

RE: We were talking about the old school and the new school.

BM: The old gym, which we used to use, that was our gym. We used it for PE, which we did not have a full time PE teacher, but we did have a nice fellow that would come some and help us, that the PTA—back then, the PTA funded things like that. But they were talking about demolishing the old gym because it was not the same color scheme, and it was in ill repair. But it was a brick building. Annie Ager and Cindy Dodson fought heartily to keep that building. I really wanted to also because to me, you just don't tear down a brick building. And that building has been used so much for the community and just so grateful that they didn't tear it down, and as they've had funds, they've updated it. It's even got heat now. It's a wonderful building and lots of things—both my girls' weddings were out at the big house, out at the Clarke farm and I've scheduled it, you could rent it for like, I think it was ten dollars an hour, and I would have that as backup just in case we got rained out. So many things, that's where my kids played, you know, Fairview Athletic Association, they played basketball there, and as my girls got older, we would play indoor soccer, we would have the moms and the daughters. Becky Stone and Betsy Clarke and Annie and Susie, we would all play soccer, indoor soccer in that building. It's gotten lots of use and still does.

RE: You talked about a camp, a church camp that was started with Susie. I'm not sure who Susie is, but tell us about that church camp.

BM: The first little program event we went to, the first day we moved here on Sunday evening, was a culmination of the summer camp, through the church, Fairview Christian Fellowship. And they were doing a play that the kids had worked on all during the summer camp. And so, then we started going to Fairview Christian Fellowship, this church, and the first summer, every summer, we had a summer camp. And it took place mostly at Susie Hamilton's house. Susie Clarke Hamilton is the oldest of eight kids. She's the eldest, then Jim, then Annie, and then five more boys. Five younger brothers. And Annie Ager has four sons that are close to my daughters' ages. And my girls are real tomboys. Susie has five kids. William and Kevin and my Sarah are the same age. And they just all became great friends. So, they had started the summer camp before we came and so the first summer we did it, and the mothers would help, the dads would come some, and we would have singing and like a little devotional in the very beginning of it, as people were getting there in the morning. I think it was like nine to three. Then, there would be amazing activities. We would take them up back then, to the big house where the horses were and Annie would teach riding lessons. Aunt Isbell, John Ager's Aunt Isbell, who is now ninety-four, I believe, and I took them to Reynolds High School to play tennis. She's a fabulous tennis player. Susie would teach them pottery and she had her own kiln. And other mothers, they would make, the kids would make their own tents, and they would have different age groups and different kind of groups and all. And then they had swim lessons, Julie Wander taught swimming. Someone else did but I remember Julie particularly. And there's a little pool behind Susie and Will Hamilton's house. They made bread, I remember making candles. They just—wove baskets, those baskets up on my mantel, my girls—Kitty Lynch helped them with those at that little summer camp

years and years ago. I just cannot tell you all the things that they did. But then they also would do a play. And by the time my girls got there, there was a lady from Scotland, Moira was her name. And she was living with Will and Susie Hamilton. They often had foreign exchange students that would come and live with them. And Annie and John did also. Moira was really a drama teacher so she really did them, and these little kids, I could believe it, they did "Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat." And of course, all the brothers had on their daddy's bathrobes, if their daddy had a bathrobe. That was pretty easy on the costuming. And it's a musical, and they pulled it off. It's really neat. Scott was Joseph, Scott Beland. My good friend Mary Dean Beland, who I met the first day, her son met my younger daughter, just by a year, and they became best friends right away and ended up getting married when they were twenty-two and twenty-three. It was really neat. They met when they were nine and ten. Scott had a booming voice, he was fabulous as Joseph—.

SJ: He's like his daddy.

BM: Very much like his daddy. And a beautiful, deep bass voice. I just couldn't believe what all they were doing. One year, Becky and Pat Stone wrote a musical and it was about Noah and the Ark, and they did that, they performed that. I remember that particular one, we even went to Fleshers Nursing Home and performed there. And some of the kids were animals and whatever. It was really neat. "Lifeboat", it was called "Lifeboat." I wish they could publish that, it was really singable music for kids.

RE: You've made reference to the big house a couple of times. For those of us who are not from around here, tell us what the big house is, what you're referring to.

BM: Okay. The big house is an old inn, Sherrill's Inn. And it's a historic house, and it is up toward—you kind of climb the mountain a little bit, on the way to Gerton, but a lot sooner than that. It'll be on your right and as you're going up the mountain, you'll see the pasture and all below and you'll kind of see the house. It's a white house, an old white house with a huge kind of wraparound front porch. Mr. and Mrs. Clarke lived there when we moved here, but it belonged to Mrs. Clarke's parents. They bought it from Mr. and Mrs. Sherrill, who had it as an inn. And it has an amazing history.

SJ: Have you ever been there?

RE: Is that the big house where John and Annie live? I know where it is then.

BM: It is the most magical place. My girls would rather—they grew up with all of the grandkids, all of Mr. and Mrs. Clarke's grandkids and they would work on the farm and then they would work hard, and then they would play hard, together. To me it was just, they were outdoors all the time. It was just a really wonderful way to grow up. And it didn't matter what you wore, it didn't matter if you were the same age, or the same sex, you could still be good friends. And they've stayed good friends through all these years. There's a picture of it in here, but anyway, this is a book that John wrote about Mrs. Clarke's father, James G. K. McClure. But anyway, that house is just magical to my family. Both my daughters were married there. One of my daughters worked there after her sophomore year in college. Both of my girls went to UNC Chapel Hill and they were just a year apart in school. And my older one took a year off between her sophomore and junior year, and she actually worked for Mr. and Mrs. Clarke, which I love because he didn't live too much longer than that. My dad died before my Jenny was born and Mr. Clarke reminded me a lot of my father. And I just loved that my Jenny and Sarah got to

spend so much time with them. They called them Grandy and Granny, just like all the grandkids. Jenny was living here and would go up to work and she'd go in dirty blue jeans and flannel shirts, and every night when she came home for dinner we'd say, 'Well, what did you do today?' And she'd say, 'Well, when I got there the pigs were out and they must have known they were going to market so Grandy and I had to round up the pigs. And then I had to serve the Biltmore Garden Club luncheon.' And I said, 'Really? Like that?', you know, dressed like that. And she said, 'No, Mrs. Clarke put me in one of her poodle skirts. And then I changed back into my blue jeans and took the riders for Annie.' Every day was just so different. And, she loved working up there and I just loved that my girls got to know them because they did not get to know either of my parents. I just thought that was really neat.

RE: What's your best memory of Fairview, Betsy, since you've been here? It sounds like there's been some great times, is there a best memory?

BM: There are just so many. There are just so many. I loved the school, I still love the school. I loved the kids. It's just the people, it's just how the people are just so—they're hardworking, they're very honest, they're very sincere. They live the Christian faith daily, in everything they do. And that just—I'd never been around people—. If you need a place to stay, they'll take you in, you'll work on the farm but then they'll feed you. And you can join in the fun, and the family adventures. It's just an amazing group of people. They're so supportive. My younger daughter had open heart surgery when she was sixteen, and she was in the little youth group at our little church, and she had been home—she came home on a Friday, she had it on a Monday down at Duke and we brought her home on Friday. The youth group ran all the way from our little church over

here to see her. And, you know, that's a pretty good little hike, and they ran it because they wanted to say, 'Hey' to her. And it's just such a supportive group, in any way. Supporting me, and at both my daughters' weddings, it wasn't just me and my daughters and a little bit of family helping, it was the whole community. When Sara and Scott got married, in the morning, it was on Saturday, all the people just brought their wildflowers and we put them in little Mason jars. They didn't want gifts, but they wanted almost like a Thanksgiving dinner. I made tons of turkeys and Sara wanted my squash casserole and Scott wanted his mother's zucchini casserole, so we would give out the recipes and so people would bring food. My Kindergarten teacher friends did a watermelon, you know with fruit in it, cut up fruit. And it was just such a joint thing. And my mother-in-law, who had never been to a wedding quite like this, she said it was the best food she had ever eaten. The only problem we had at all was, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be smart to put some of it underneath the table.' So we didn't have to go all the way to the spring house. Well, I didn't know that Jack the Lab, also like squash casserole. And then we actually had puppies. After we were in that first house, we were there for about a year, we sold the house in Raleigh but then that house sold, so we could start building this, but we had to move to this little trailer off of Emma's Grove, to make it the school year before we could have this finished. And, we had a little Cocker Spaniel who got out after church one day for two seconds, and eight puppies later, they were all healthy. I had to take a half day off from school because it was snowing and we were staying in this little mobile home, that our bedroom wasn't heated nor was the living room heated. And she started having them on this little bathroom rug, right by my bed. I was afraid they'd freeze to death, so I had to take a half day off from school and I didn't know, I'd never birthed any puppies, I

didn't know what would happen. So, I just pulled the bathmat with Alex and—there were six puppies then, and I pulled them over to the heated bathroom. And then when I left to go to school at eleven thirty, there were six puppies, all blond like her. When I got back after school, I made Kitty Lynch come home with me, it was in the old school. I said, 'You've got to check out these puppies. I don't know anything.' There were two black ones in there. And there were eight by then. And my first reaction was, 'This is not fair. Somebody has come and dumped two more puppies, that aren't ours.' But sure enough, they were. Douglas took one of them, Annie's youngest son, and they named him Tip O'Neill. And he was the ugliest dog. He had this pointy nose. He was black with a couple little white splotches, skinny little toothpick legs. He didn't look like a Cocker at all. I realized then that it looked like Daddy. And that dog was, he would sleep in the bed with the boys when John would wake them up for school, he's just growl at John. And then he, when it was time to eat, little Tip O would make Jack the Lab stand aside, while he ate what he wanted first. And then Jack could have some food. Oh, he was ornery, he wasn't a thing like the mama. But anyway, it's just the people. I cannot tell you all the experiences.

RE: You wanted to talk to us about the Kosovo family.

BM: Well, that's a John Ager thing. Our little church, as little as we are, had sponsored a refugee family from Kosovo. They were a grandma and a granddaddy, a daughter, and two sons. And one of the sons was married and had two little children. And they were the quietest and the calmest family. The fact is that John and Annie moved over to live with Mrs. Clarke so that their family could have their house, which is just this little—not lean-to but just a very small house. They've added on to it through the years.

My girls loved going up to the Ager house because you could play real basketball in the dining room. Real hoops.

SJ: My son loved to go there too.

BM: Real basketball. And their birthday parties were spent climbing the roof and swinging off and whatever. But, this family was very calm and I thought, 'Okay.' Another family was supposed to come like in May, and I thought, 'I'm off from school in the summer, I could house, I could take them in and I'd have time to spend with them.' Well, it never happened so I kind of forgot about it and then one day—I tutored a couple kids after school right here at this table, and between the two kids, John Ager called and he said—it was October twenty-eighth—and he called and he said, 'Betsy, guess what? They'll be here in an hour.' I said, 'John, that's wonderful. Who will be here in an hour?' And he said, 'The Kosovo family. I found out why they didn't come in the summer, because they had the sixth baby in the refugee camp in Macedonia.' So, I'm just like, 'Oh my goodness. They'll be here in an hour. They have an infant, a three-month-old. I don't have that much—.' I mentioned it to sweet Heather Queen's mother. I was getting ready to—and I just said I've just got the craziest phone call.' And while I was tutoring her daughter Heather, she went and brought loads of groceries. I mean that's how sweet and wonderful people are that live here. And so, they did come in an hour, and they lived with me for about four months, and it was very lively, with six kids and the mama and the daddy. And we took the eldest three—fifth, third, and first. The oldest two had only been to a little bit of school because of the war in Kosovo and then they'd lived in a refugee camp in Macedonia for six months. And the only English they knew, and it was the girls, the three eldest are girls, was, 'If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.' And I

knew no Albanian, that's the language they speak. And I'd never taught English to non-English speakers. We just kind of made it and the kids, especially, I'd be brushing my teeth and they'd all be in the bathroom with me and we'd sing, 'This is the way,' and they'd say, 'Broosh our teeth, broosh our teeth.' And so, we did a lot of sing-songing. They were amazing. They picked up English so quickly. People accuse me of teaching them Southern English, and I don't even realize I'm saying it, but their English is just impeccable. I cannot tell you how many experiences we had, you know, with them. We did a Jack-o-lantern, because it was Halloween. I let them carve it and so the little pizza place, what was it used to called? Not what it is now, but—Fairview Pizza. They would send home pizza. What happened was, I was still tutoring these two kids. Well, I couldn't tutor here at home because Mama and Daddy and the kids were all on top of me, and that wasn't fair. So, I had to tutor at my little church, and then the little pizza place—a couple afternoons a week, the little pizza place—I could pick up pizza and spaghetti on the way home. And that would be dinner. Well, one night I come home, of course we'd had the Jack-o-lantern out and back then the Fairview Fire Department in the community center, had a huge Halloween party and the kids, these Kosovo kids, at first they saw someone dressed up in camouflage and they kind of went back and leaned against me and hid behind me and all because that scared them. They didn't know what Halloween was, they had no idea. But then they discovered there was candy. Oh, I found candy wrappers all over my house, for years. Especially downstairs. It was just wild and so one night, I came home from school, and I wasn't tutoring. Hannafa, the mother, was cooking something for us, something from her culture, and I'm thinking, 'Oh, good. This looks like cheese. I can eat this. This is good. I love—it looked kind of like a Cheddar cheese, I love cheese.

This is great.' I took one bite of it, and realized, 'This isn't cheese. I'm not sure what it is.' And I always kept little Ilona, she was three, in my lap. She'd come out when I'd drive in. She'd come out with her arms up for me to pick her up. She's just adorable. Anyway, she always sat in my lap while we ate, so I could feed her too, if it was something that I had a little bit of a hard time with. Finally, I looked up and thought, 'What am I eating?' I looked up and realized the Jack-o-lantern was missing, that it had smoke, you know it had the candle lit in it on Halloween. So, we were eating—I'm not sure what had been done to it, but anyway it was quite an experience. And then, you know, we had Christmas with them, and they just loved—we chopped down one of my trees down there and they hauled it up and decorated it. And a little cheerleading group, Vicky Pope's daughter was in a cheerleading group at Reynolds Middle or High School, maybe High School, so they kind of adopted my little family for Christmas gifts. The kids didn't know what this was, but they had learned enough, they'd go under the Christmas tree and they'd say, 'For Chundreysa.' You know, they could read their names. And I'll never forget, little Chundreysa, she said—they had kind of made their little piles and she said, 'No for Bessie. I for Bessie.' And she was giving me her gift. It was just so touching.

RE: What happened to that family?

BM: They still live here. We're still very good friends. Hannafa does the garden up at the big house. She has got a green thumb like no other. She is out there weeding in the middle of July, in that hot sun. She can make anything grow. And that's where the vegetable garden and the flowers come from up at Annie's. She's been tending to that for years now. She's made them make her kind of a greenhouse type thing. They built a

Habitat for Humanity house. It has three bedrooms and it's behind, in the Oakley area, kind of behind Home Depot. I organized a little group from church to come and help. None of the children were old enough to be able to help. I think you had to be sixteen or older. So, none of them were old enough to help, but we—and Rageep worked on it and it got built and they still live there and we got the eldest, Adona, into college. She went to UNC Greensboro, and then Pitessa, the second eldest is working for a doctor, an endocrinologist, that works with diabetes. The girls have such a servant's heart, because they are so used to serving the men. But they just, in general, they've all been wonderful waitresses and had those jobs and now Pitessa's working with people with diabetes and she's just very calming and caring. Chundreysa, the third one—and they are all two years apart, the oldest three are girls. Pitessa just steals my heart, she has such a soft, sweet, sweet, heart. But she's working and working on getting her masters. And Adona is going through the Vet Tech program at AB Tech, which I hear is a fabulous—she's always adored animals. And I'm so glad she's doing that, that's a tough program, but I've heard it's really good one at AB Tech. I'm so glad she's pursuing her passion, her dreams. After they lived here, about four months, then they went to live in a little house, kind of catty corner from the Fairview Library. And it was right after the Fairview Library had been built. These girls—I mean the whole family loved books. Chindreysa came on October twenty-eighth, in first grade, had never been to school, even in Kosovo. Won the first-grade spelling bee. All in English. Because she was just so determined to learn. I got a phone call a couple of summers after the library had been built, and it was Betsy Parker saying, 'Betsy,' talking to me, 'Your children have been to—.' And I thought, 'What have my children done now. They were always called my children and I was always

getting in trouble for whatever. They managed to spend the night in the library, in the summer. They figured out how to get one of them locked in the bathroom, as they were locking up, and then go open the door and let the rest of them in. And they got found out because they're used to taking their shoes off before they enter a building, and so some of them when they left forgot to get—because it was summer they just went out barefooted and forgot to get their shoes. Betsy Parker was not real thrilled. But, can you imagine? Kids wanting to get locked in to a library? Plus, when the Fairview Library, we had all brand-new books. It could not have been built for a family more than them. Because it was just like heaven to them. We had to limit how many books they checked out, because they would come out of the door, sit right there on the concrete and start looking through the books. It was just lots of interesting experiences.

RE: Tell us, as you look back over Fairview through all the years you've been here, what's been the biggest change you've seen in Fairview since you've been here?

BM: I guess the growth, so many more people. Like these two houses beyond me didn't exist. They built and there's actually another one building in there now. And, I know they probably didn't want me and my family to come because they thought Fairview was big enough, and now, I want people to come, but I still like keeping this community spirit. That's one reason I love the Welcome Table. I retired about seven years ago, and as soon as I retired, we started the Welcome Table. I helped start that, I'm on the board of it, and the crazy thing is I don't even cook for myself. I'm just lazy. I can follow a recipe, I can wash produce and stuff like that, and do what they tell me to do. But most of these people are really instinctive cooks and all and I'm not, but I've loved having that sense of community. I really have.

RE: Do you think that the sense of community will be able to be maintained as new people come into Fairview?

BM: A lot of it is, I think a lot of it is. Some people maybe are a little bit standoffish or something, like my neighbor beyond me. She's from up north and it's just a different—I guess because I'm from the south too, but it's just—. I hope we'll maintain that sense of community. I really do. I love it, I work also with the Lord's Acre. I'm on the fundraising, I've been helping fundraise for years with that. And that's such a—I just feel like the causes are so worthy, that the people here in Fairview do. They just reach out if there's a need they try to figure out how to meet it, and that to me, is just so inspirational and the way I like to live. And it's just so great that there's so many other people feel the same way.

RE: As you look to the future, do you have any concern about Fairview and what might happen to it?

BM: I guess if we do lose too much of that sense of community, but so far it hasn't all the way at all. But I'm just hoping that it doesn't get too big, and people are kind of polarized sometimes in their political views or whatever. I feel like we just need to love people, show them that we love them, and it's okay to talk about ideas without—and maybe I'm wrong in my ideas, just have a discussion. Not name calling, not any vindictive or anything like that.

RE: Does Fairview have a welcome wagon type thing?

SJ: Just the Welcome Table.

RE: But how to people know about that? I was here two and a half years, of course I'm in the Reynolds community not in Fairview—.

BM: Do you get the newspaper, the Fairview Town Crier?

RE: Yes, I do.

BM: It's in there. I remember when we started, when they started that, it was just like one sheet, or two, a pamphlet type thing.

SJ: But the Welcome Table is great because I've met Roshanna and Helene.

BM: Yes, yes, yes.

RE: I keep thinking I'm going to be part of the Welcome Table too, just because I love that sense of community. I have never lived anywhere where I hear about the sense of community like I do with Fairview. And I think it's just remarkable but I think it is kind of outlining—I hate to say this, but—expectations of newcomers, that you know, this is kind how we, we love it here because we do this, and I hate to say that it's kind of relaying the expectations to newcomers, that this is kind of what we do.

BM: Because you might feel left out?

RE: Well, that they need to understand that that's kind of how this group operates. That it's a welcoming, but this is how the group operates. So we're welcoming you and hope you will welcome the others, is really the kind of underlying message. This probably shouldn't be on this tape, but I've decided on my street that I'm a one person welcoming committee, so when somebody moves into the house on our neighbor street, I take a cake or pie or something to them and say, 'I just want to introduce myself, say

welcome,' and we're going to have a little gathering at our house but as comfortable as we are as neighbors, we've never had an exchange of reaching out for each other. And I think that's kind of something that's missing, you know, in a lot of areas. But it's different in Fairview.

BM: To me, it really is. I guess I felt so welcomed, you know, and my girls got so involved with the kids. Our church was small but we had a large youth group when they were growing up. And they did all sorts of things together. And they would go rake somebody's yard, or go work in somebody's yard, you know, and then have watermelon afterward or something. It's very service-oriented and that might be instigated some through the Clarkes, and handed down through Susie and Annie. They just reach out. Nobody's a stranger.

RE: As Fairview ages, do you think that's going to continue? Because is Fairview seeing a growth of young families or—.

BM: I think it is. I hope so, I really do. I've been working a little bit with the Fairview Elementary School nowadays and one of my daughter's really good friends who played tennis with them, Andi Dotson Elliott has married a fellow named Rob Elliott and he's wonderful in the PTA board, but he plays music and I love—have you ever been to Hickory Nut Gap Farm? They have lots of square dances and just fun events there and to me, that's very welcoming. I've met a lot of people through the school, you know, younger couples and younger people. And that's the reason I helped with the Fall Festival. I saw it on Facebook that they could use some help and I thought, 'Well, that's something I can do. It's just one afternoon and I would like to give back.' But it was all these young ladies, you know, running it and they did a fabulous job. But a lot of them

chose this area for their kids to grow up, and that's kind of how we ended up here, we ended up here by the school situation. I knew that we would be going to Reynolds Middle and Reynolds High School. We'd only be a little bit at Fairview. I didn't know that much about Fairview, I knew the building was practically falling down but—because I knew my girls would be going to public school. So that's kind of how we ended up here. And the education they got? One of them became a large animal veterinarian because of Annie Ager and the horses. My other daughter is a statistician. They both were very well prepared for college, going to Reynolds Middle and Reynolds High School. Very well prepared. And so, that's been a real blessing.

RE: We don't want to wear you out, so is there anything else you think we just need to hear about Betsy Milford's life in Fairview? Because I love listening to you. I could sit here all day. Sandra, can you think of anything? Sandra knows everything about everybody.

SJ: No, I do not. The latest thing, and we've already talked about it, is the Welcome Table. That to me is marvelous. I love that.

BM: The Lord's Acre is just an amazing thing. Because you can go there just to learn. They'll teach you classes on whatever you want to learn.

RE: It's on my list of things to do next spring.

BM: Susan is just—.

SJ: We liked talking to Susan too.

RE: Let's turn this thing off.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Alice Helms

Date: April 10, 2020